

District: Town of Needham
 School Name: Pollard Middle School
 Recommended Category: Preferred Schematic
 Date: February 18, 2026

Recommendation

That the Executive Director be authorized to approve the Town of Needham (the “District”), as part of its Invitation to Feasibility Study, to proceed into Schematic Design to replace the existing Pollard Middle School with a new facility serving grades 6-8 on the site of the existing school. MSBA staff has reviewed the Feasibility Study and accepts the District’s Preferred Schematic.

District Information	
District Name	Town of Needham
Elementary Schools	Newman Elementary School (PK-5) Broadmeadow Elementary School (K-5) John Elliot Elementary School (K-5) Sunita L. Williams Elementary School (K-5) William Mitchell Elementary School (K-5)
Middle Schools	High Rock School (6) Pollard Middle School (7-8)
High School	Needham High School (9-12)
Priority School Name	Pollard Middle School
Type of School	Middle School
Grades Served	7-8
Year Opened	1956
Existing Square Footage	146,900
Additions	1968, 1992 – major additions/renovations 2002 – addition of ten modular classrooms
Acreage of Site	15.38 acres
Building Issues	The District identified deficiencies in the following areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Structural integrity – Mechanical systems – Electrical systems – Plumbing systems – Fire Protection system – Building envelope – Windows – Accessibility In addition to the physical plant issues, the District reported that the existing facility does not support the delivery of its educational program as well as existing and projected overcrowding.
Original Design Capacity	Unknown
2025-2026 Enrollment	875 students
Agreed Upon Enrollment	Study Enrollment includes the following configurations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 880 students in grades 7-8 – 1,335 students in grades 6-8 (Preferred Schematic)

District Information	
Enrollment Specifics	Contingent upon the Board’s approval of the Preferred Schematic, the District will sign a Design Enrollment Certification for 1,335 students in grades 6-8.
Total Project Budget – Debt Exclusion Anticipated	Yes

MSBA Board Votes	
Invitation to Eligibility Period	December 13, 2023
Invitation to Feasibility Study	October 30, 2024
Preferred Schematic Authorization	On February 25, 2026 Board agenda
Project Scope & Budget Authorization	District is targeting Board authorization on August 26, 2026
Feasibility Study Reimbursement Rate (Incentive points are not applicable)	35.42%

Consultants	
Owner’s Project Manager (the “OPM”)	Town of Needham
Designer	HMFH Architects, Inc.

Discussion

The existing Pollard Middle School is a 146,900 square foot facility located on a 15.38-acre site that currently serves students in grades 7-8. The original school building was constructed in 1956 with major additions and renovations completed in 1968 and 1992, and the addition of ten modular classrooms in 2002.

The District’s Statement of Interest (“SOI”) identified numerous deficiencies in the existing facility associated with the following: outdated mechanical, electrical, plumbing and fire protection systems; building envelope; windows; accessibility issues; and overcrowding. In addition, structural and seismic improvements are needed. The SOI also indicates existing spaces are not conducive for delivering the District’s educational program.

As part of the Feasibility Study, the MSBA accepted the District’s request to explore options that included relocating grade 6 into the middle school, which resulted in the following study enrollment options: 880 students in grades 7-8; and 1,335 students in grades 6-8.

In conjunction with its consultants, the District performed a comprehensive assessment of the existing conditions and the educational program and received input from educators, administrators, and facilities personnel. Based on the findings of this effort, the District and its consultants initially studied seven (7) preliminary options that included: one (1) code upgrade option, two (2) addition/renovation options, and four (4) new construction options. The following is a detailed list of the preliminary options considered:

Option	Description of Preliminary Options
Option 1	Code Upgrade/Repair for grades 7-8 with an enrollment of 880 students at the existing Pollard Middle School; with an estimated project cost of \$130.8 million.

Option	Description of Preliminary Options
Option 2	Addition/Renovation option (with existing Administration Suite, Art and Music Classrooms, Auditorium, Gymnasia and Cafeteria to remain) for grades 7-8 with an enrollment of 880 students at the existing Pollard Middle School; with an estimated project cost of \$261.9 million.
Option 3	Addition/Renovation option (with existing Administration Suite, Art and Music Classrooms, Auditorium, Gymnasia and Cafeteria to remain) for grades 6-8 with an enrollment of 1,335 students at the existing Pollard Middle School; with an estimated project cost of \$310.8 million.
Option 4	New Construction option for grades 7-8 with an enrollment of 880 students on the fields of the existing Pollard Middle School site; with an estimated project cost of \$256.1 million.
Option 5	New Construction option for grades 6-8 with an enrollment of 1,335 students on the fields of the existing Pollard Middle School site; with an estimated project cost of \$310.1 million.
Option 6	New Construction option for grades 7-8 with an enrollment of 880 students on the DeFazio site; with an estimated project cost of \$249.5 million.
Option 7	New Construction option for grades 6-8 with an enrollment of 1,335 students on the DeFazio site; with an estimated project cost of \$303.4 million.

As a result of this analysis, the District determined that all seven (7) options would be considered for further evaluation. However, subsequent to the evaluation of preliminary options, the District developed sub-options for “Option 4” and “Option 5” resulting in two (2) additional new construction options as described below:

- “Option 4B”: New Construction option (two phases) for grades 7-8 with an enrollment of 880 students, located on the hillside of the existing Pollard Middle School site; and,
- “Option 5E”: New Construction option (two phases) for grades 6-8 with an enrollment of 1,335 students, located on the hillside of the existing Pollard Middle School site.

Additionally, the District further developed and renamed the following three options:

- “Option 5” is referred to as “Option 5D”;
- “Option 6” is referred to as “Option 6A”; and,
- “Option 7” is referred to as “Option 7C”.

MSBA staff and the District agreed to explore the following nine (9) options for further development and consideration in the final evaluation and development of preliminary design pricing, as presented below, including: one (1) code upgrade option, two (2) addition/renovation options, and six (6) new construction options.

Summary of Preliminary Design Pricing for Final Evaluation of Options

Option (Description)	Total Gross Square Feet	Square Feet of Renovated Space (cost*/sq. ft.)	Square Feet of New Construction (cost*/sq. ft.)	Site, Building Takedown, Haz Mat. Cost*	Estimated Total Construction ** (cost*/sq. ft.)	Estimated Total Project Costs
Option 1: Base Repair for 880 students Gr. 7-8	146,900	146,900 (\$698/sf)	-	\$14,553,144	\$117,107,328 (\$797/sf)	\$152,200,000
Option 2: Add/Reno for 880 students Gr. 7-8	210,509	66,681 (\$670/sf)	143,828 (\$732/sf)	\$49,932,209	199,968,967 (\$950/sf)	\$260,000,000
Option 3: Add/Reno for 1,335 students Gr. 6-8	255,832	66,681 (\$667/sf)	189,151 (\$719/sf)	\$51,783,435	\$232,139,305 (\$907/sf)	\$301,800,000
Option 4: New Construction (at Pollard fields) for 880 students Gr. 7-8	206,108	-	206,108 (\$806/sf)	\$25,838,742	\$191,945,008 (\$931/sf)	\$249,500,000
Option 4B: New Construction (Pollard hillside) for 880 students Gr. 7-8	206,108	-	206,108 (\$802/sf)	\$46,979,348	\$212,357,167 (\$1030/sf)	\$276,100,000
Option 5D: New Construction (at Pollard fields) for 1,335 students Gr. 6-8	257,872	-	257,872 (\$772/sf)	\$31,410,735	\$230,597,998 (\$894/sf)	\$299,800,000
Option 5E: New Construction (at Pollard hillside) for 1,335 students Gr. 6-8***	257,872	-	257,872 (\$783/sf)	\$56,855,208	\$258,693,479 (\$1,003/sf)	\$336,300,000
Option 6A: New Construction (at DeFazio site) for 880 students Gr. 7-8	206,108	-	206,108 (\$761/sf)	\$58,477,534	\$215,270,078 (\$1,044/sf)	\$279,900,000
Option 7C: New Construction (at DeFazio site) for 1,335 students Gr.6-8	257,872	-	257,872 (\$743/sf)	\$57,625,112	\$249,307,817 (\$967/sf)	\$324,100,000

* Marked up construction costs

** Does not include construction contingency

***District's Preferred Schematic

The District has selected "Option 5E" as its Preferred Schematic to proceed into Schematic Design. The District determined that Option 5E best meets the needs of the educational program and aligns

with the District's decision to reunite grade 6 with the grades 7-8, as outlined in the District's 2022 School Master Plan. Additionally, the District indicated that this option allows for a dedicated academic wing for grade 6; improves traffic patterns, emergency access, and parking capacity; positions the new building further away from the existing railroad/MBTA tracks; and accommodates space for potential stormwater and geothermal systems. Furthermore, the District noted that this option allows the existing High Rock School to be repurposed for elementary school grades.

"Option 1" was not selected by the District because the District indicated that the existing facility does not meet the needs of their educational program. Further, the District noted that this option is not anticipated to alleviate overcrowding and would not support the inclusion of grade 6 students.

"Option 2" was not selected by the District primarily because this option does not support the inclusion of grade 6 students. The District also indicated that this option would likely result in insufficient learning spaces in renovated areas and would present challenges related to mechanical, electrical, and sustainability goals. In addition, the District anticipated that this option would be highly disruptive to teaching and learning due to phasing and construction sequencing while the building remained in continuous use as a school.

"Option 3" was not selected by the District despite allowing the existing High Rock School to be repurposed for elementary school grades. The District indicated that the renovated areas in this option would continue to provide insufficient learning spaces and would present challenges related to mechanical, electrical, and sustainability goals. In addition, the District anticipated that this option would be highly disruptive to teaching and learning due to phasing and construction sequencing while the building remained in continuous use as a school.

"Option 4" and "Option 4B" were not selected by the District primarily because these options do not support the inclusion of grade 6 students. The District also indicated that, due to the close proximity of these options to the railroad/MBTA tracks, they would likely result in limited space and capacity for geothermal and storm water systems.

Although "Option 5D" supports the inclusion of grade 6 students and allows the existing High Rock School to be repurposed for elementary school grades, this option was not selected by the District because the building layout does not allow for a separate grade 6 wing. Additionally, the District noted that the location of building would result in less desirable proximity to the railroad/MBTA tracks, which may limit anticipated space and capacity for geothermal and storm water systems.

"Option 6A" was not selected by the District primarily because the Town of Needham and the local park commission voted against the DeFazio site development. The District indicated this scenario would involve Article 97 legislation and could potentially lead to major traffic challenges and disruption of field access during construction.

Although "Option 7C" allows the existing High Rock School to be repurposed for elementary school grades, this option was not selected by the District primarily because the Town of Needham and the local park commission voted against the DeFazio site development. The District indicated this scenario would involve Article 97 legislation and could potentially lead to major traffic challenges and disruption of field access during construction.

The District presented its proposed Preferred Schematic to the MSBA Facilities Assessment Subcommittee (“FAS”) on January 28, 2026. At that meeting, members of the FAS discussed the following items: appreciation for the Educational Program and the updates made since the original submission; distribution of special education spaces and the DESE review process following Schematic Design; appreciation for the proposed Heritage Spanish Program; flooding and stormwater management on the site; community outreach and support for the project among non-school affiliated voters; considerations surrounding the distribution of restrooms to ensure accessibility; appreciation for the proposed site plan and the transition between parking areas, landscape, and the building; alignment of site drop off and entrance designs with existing student transportation methods; interior circulation and distribution of grade 6 students in comparison to grade 7 and grade 8 students; appreciation and emphasis of maintaining the proposed solar canopy over third floor outdoor roof space; future discussion about site constraints including soil management, phasing, and construction access through the neighborhood once a construction manager at risk is on board; solar battery storage considerations; noise mitigation from nearby MBTA tracks; consideration of altering placement of art and music spaces with the media center to facilitate programmatic opportunities for art classes; differentiation of the two primary entrances; ongoing efforts to align the estimated project budget with the District’s not-to-exceed budget during Schematic Design; and potential impacts to the scope and construction schedule as a result of proposed geothermal well-fields requiring access under existing railroad tracks.

MSBA staff reviewed the conclusions of the Feasibility Study and all other subsequent submittals with the District and found:

- 1) The options investigated were sufficiently comprehensive in scope, the approach undertaken in this study was appropriate, and the District’s Preferred Schematic is reasonable and cost-effective and meets the needs identified by the District.
- 2) The District has submitted an operational budget for educational objectives and a capital budget statement for MSBA review.
- 3) The District’s Special Education submission will be subject to final review and approval by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education as part of the Schematic Design submittal, which is prior to executing a Project Scope and Budget Agreement.
- 4) Subject to Board approval, the MSBA will participate in a project that includes spaces that meet MSBA guidelines, except for variations previously agreed to by the MSBA. All proposed spaces will be reviewed during the Schematic Design phase.
- 5) As part of the Schematic Design phase, the District will work with the MSBA to determine a mutually agreeable methodology to differentiate eligible costs from ineligible costs.

Based on the review outlined above, staff recommend that the Town of Needham be approved to proceed into Schematic Design to replace the existing Pollard Middle School with a new facility serving grades 6-8 on the site of the existing school.